

Letter from state Supreme Court: ‘As judges, we must recognize the role we have played in devaluing black lives’



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WASHINGTON — The Washington Supreme Court issued an open letter Thursday calling on the judicial and legal community to work together on racial justice.

In part, the letter stated:

“The devaluation and degradation of black lives is not a recent event. It is a persistent and systemic injustice that predates this nation’s founding. But recent events have brought to the forefront of our collective consciousness a painful fact that is, for too many of our citizens, common knowledge: the injustices faced by black Americans are not relics of the past. We continue to see racialized policing and the overrepresentation of black Americans in every stage of our criminal and juvenile justice systems. Our institutions remain affected by the vestiges of slavery: Jim Crow laws that were never dismantled and racist court decisions that were never disavowed.”

The letter also pointed out that the legal community must see how it bears responsibility for the ongoing injustice. It also stated that the community can take steps to address the injustice with courage and the will to move toward it.

The letter also addressed how judges have played a role in devaluing black lives: “This very court once held that a cemetery could lawfully deny grieving black parents the right to bury their infant. We cannot undo this wrong—but we can recognize our ability to do better in the future. We can develop a greater awareness of our own conscious and unconscious biases in order to make just decisions in individual cases, and we can administer justice and support court rules in a way that brings greater racial justice to our system as a whole.”

The letter called on lawyers and members of the bar to admit the harms they have caused when “meritorious claims go unaddressed due to systemic inequities or the lack of financial, personal, or systemic support” and that they “must also recognize that this is not how a justice system must operate.”

The letter also stated in its final recourse: “We must recognize that systemic racial injustice against black Americans is not an omnipresent specter that will inevitably persist. It is the collective product of each of our individual actions—every action, every day. It is only by carefully reflecting on our actions, taking individual responsibility for them, and constantly striving for better that we can address the shameful legacy we inherit. We call on every member of our legal community to reflect on this moment and ask ourselves how we may work together to eradicate racism.”

To read the letter in its entirety, [click here](#).